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Michael Quatro: Reaching out to sell

Quatro plays semi-professional hockey.

Rock & Pop

by Juan Rodriguez

Michael Quatro, the electric keyboardist, knows he is what rock 'n' roll is all about.

Picture him: A short, loose, not old, not young man with hair that sprouts like he stepped out of the shower a half hour ago. The record company promotion men wait on the other side of the hotel room, while a blonde sleeps away the dinner hour. Quatro is nearby, his files of press clippings at the ready. He has a concert (as the opening act) in Toronto's Massey Hall a couple of hours from now, but he has been conducting interviews, all comers, at an hourly rate.

He says unabashedly: "I've been in the business long enough to know that you've got to reach out there and sell your goods, let people know you're around."

Quatro used to be a child prodigy pianist and all-round musician. Eventually he became a top concert producer during the heyday of the Detroit rock scene. Now he's on the road, armed with an arsenal of keyboards (he uses 300 keys and 200 dials), smoke bombs and glitter costumes, and a record entitled Michael Quatro In Collaboration with The Gods.

"Sometimes I think I've got everything," he admitted. "I play a concert in Chicago, let's say. I get off the stage at 9 p.m., get on a plane to Detroit, arrive at the hockey rink by 11 where I play centre in a semi-professional league. Yeah, I'm pretty good at it, too, I've trained with the Red Wings. Then I go home, get bombed on a little something, make it with her a couple times, and fall asleep. What more could I ask for, right?"

He says the initial spark for his flashy gaudy 15-keyboard show came when he saw the prototype for an acoustic piano Baldwin had made with each key electronically monitored.

"This was no rinky-dink instrument, you understand, it cost them $300,000 to build. So I walked into Baldwin and I said, 'Give me that piano, I've got some great ideas for it'."

Michael Quatro lets people know he's around.

What he does is take familiar classical phrases and make them into souped-up rock riffs with the functionality of the television ads for 100 Memorable Moments of Music discs. He wears sequined capes and romps around with a large gold cane that explodes into smoke when he hammers it onto the stage. He hands you a press-clip sheet with raves from 26 publications: "Plays a synthesizer like it was in heat . . .", ". . . sends your blood pressure soaring, yet the most potent tranquilizer . . .", ". . . funkiness and 1,000 years of culture wrapped up in one human being."

"I'm convinced that were Beethoven or Mozart or any of these alive today, they'd be dabbling and creating on electric instruments. I cannot be so bold as to say they'd sound like me — I'll let others say that if they want to.

"But, tell me, do you think anyone will be listening to Van Cliburn a hundred years from now? He is hardly playing music of this age. People will refer back, instead, to Led Zeppelin's Stairway to Heaven, or Elton John, or maybe my music."

He says he believes the classical musician is "only a halfway musician" but he's also not impressed by the current popular jazz keyboard scene: "I find jazz terribly easy to play. I could do it falling asleep."

Quatro glances fondly at the young woman slumbering in his bed and hauls out a brown envelope with photos of himself and her, in the nude: "Aren't they great? If the record company approves, I'll use them for my next album."

Ex-CFOX man now top London DJ

By TERRY HAIG
of The Gazette

LONDON — In the Montreal of the 1960s few pop disc-jockeys left marks of any permanence.

However, there were a few. Dave Boxer and George Morris orchestrated Beatlemania Montreal-style. Dave Patrick lugged his country sophistication around to several stations and Doug Pringle became the prototype for the FM jock of the 70s.

In the magic year of 1967 there was Roger Scott. Scott was the man with the British accent who did the 8 p.m. to 2 a.m. show on CFOX — at a time when people were still listening to the West Island station.

One remembers Scott on those warm summer nights during Expo when his accent seemed in perfect harmony with the whole spirit of the world exhibition.

Scott loft the station in mid-1968, returned for a short stint a year later then was finally laid off as the station fell on hard times.

Today, following a series of ups and downs Roger Scott is the top disc-jockey in London.

CORNERSTONE

He is the cornerstone of Capital Radio, London's first commercial pop station and he has the most listeners on the most listened-to local pop station in the world.

Over a million people tune in his Saturday morning show when the new top 40 songs are listed. His weekday afternoon show has drawn raves from London's entertainment bible, Time Out, and most of the other who listen to it.

In talking to Scott one comes away feeling good — perhaps the way his listeners do. He is a refreshing change from star-struck personalities caught up in the wonder of themselves.

There is nothing show-biz about Scott. He gives freely of his time without pretentions.

He is more excited about the possibilities of his young station than he is about himself. Rather than being bitter about the way he was let go by CFOX, he shakes his head sadly at the hard times which befell it.

PROFESSIONAL

Scott has the ability to feel and be real which may account for his success in these troubled times over here. He himself says it was the sense of professionalism he picked up during his four years in North American commercial radio which has made him No. 1 in London.

Following five years as an officer in the merchant navy, the London-bred Scott got his start in Albany, N.Y.

He simply showed up at WPTR one night in 1966 and asked for a job. Luckily, it was the height of the British pop invasion and Scott was awarded a television commercial promoting the station.

Lightening struck. The WPTR switchboard lit up. Listeners wanted to know who he was. He appeared as a regular guest on night show and talked of his 'friends,' the Beatles, Stones and Dave Clark Five — none of whom he had ever met.

A short time later Scott had the evening job all to himself. Eight months later in December of 1966 to 23-year-old Scott came to CFOX.

In mid-1968 he ran out of gas and went to Halifax before coming back for a final fling in Montreal as the CFOX afternoon man in 1969.

When Scott returned to England he waited for the advent of commercial radio, which everyone knew was coming but no one was sure when.

Meanwhile he did promotions and ran a factory radio station before applying for the job as Capital's program director after the station had finally been given government go-ahead. He was refused.

But in August 1973 he auditioned — along with 2,000 others — as a disc-jockey. He landed the job.

"I really think it was because of my North American training," Scott says now. "In the radio business there you either make it or you don't and you have to know your trade well. I knew mine."

BIG AUDIENCE

Capital Radio went on the air in October 1973 and in less than two years its weekly audience has climbed to 3,700,000 people.

The station claims it has the largest audience of any local commercial station in the world.

Capital sounds very much like most North American pop stations but because it is not competing with dozens of ohers it lacks their frantic quality.

Scott likes the idea of no direct competition with other commercial stations.

"It allows us to experiment a bit without the fear of the listener pushing a button to someone else. But at the same time we try to keep it tight."

Because of musicians' union rules the station is allowed only nine hours of actual needle-time — or time the needle is on a playing record.

As a result the station features a lot of live shows, something unheard of in North America.

Scott believes in his station: "For me, it's the best radio station ever heard in the world. It's more listenable than anything in New York or Los Angeles."

PROUD

Scott is proud of the community work that the station has done. One long weekend it raised $20,000 for underpriviledged children.

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